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REVIEW ESSAY

CULTURAL INTERPRETATION AND MASS COMMUNICATION

Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*.
New York: Schocken Books, 1975.

For two decades Raymond Williams has been making an important and persistent contribution to our understanding of the nature and role of communication in contemporary life. Some of his works, particularly *Culture and Society*, *The Long Revolution*, *Communications*, and *The Country and the City*, have found an audience outside of Great Britain, but they have not been well understood or seriously studied by students of communications, and, consequently, they have had little impact on communication research. It is possible that his most recent work, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, will rectify this situation, bringing Williams to the attention of the general intellectual public in the United States as well as awakening interest among communications scholars.¹

This possibility, however, says more about the intellectual climate of America than it does about the book itself, for this particular work is not one of Williams' best. It attempts to exemplify and apply the theoretical position Williams has been working on for two decades, and for this alone it is both inter-

esting and significant. Unfortunately, the arguments made are often elliptical, for they assume the reader's acquaintance with his other works. Moreover, the particular analyses often are not very convincing. This is most unfortunate, for Williams' great strength has always been his sensitivity to the concrete details of language and forms of communication. Nevertheless, the book must be considered of major importance for the range of questions which it opens, and for the systematic insights it presents into the nature of mass communication.

Williams' work is a species of radical and critical theory, for it calls into question all the root assumptions scholars and the public normally make about mass communication. Since the birth of film, the mass media have been defined as a social problem, and, as a result, society puts pressure on scholars to find solutions to the difficulties the media present. Such pressures lead scholars away from the radical reflection necessary to an understanding of the mass media. For example, thought about communication in the contemporary world, whether it takes place in the university, the broadcast studio, or the home, is defined by a series of preconceptions and assumptions which limit and sanitize the questions one can ask. We begin our reflection with a given understanding of the nature of communication, as well as of the acceptable forms of "reasonable inquiry." These assumptions usually preclude the researcher from ever examining the actual structures, practices, and decisions which are the ongoing activities and products of the mass media. The media must be abstracted out of the everyday life of society if we are to find ways of measuring their effects or of elucidating their functions. In this process of abstraction we lose the intimate connection between forms of social life and forms of communication. Furthermore, we claim that our knowledge of social and communicative processes is valid independent of the totality of our lived experience. But social thought—in this case, thought about mass communication—is itself part of the social world which we inhabit and must be constantly reflected upon. Normal science seems compelled to exclude itself from the social totality which is its object of study. We must recognize that the decisions which have made the mass media what they are have been made on the basis of a particular understanding of mass communication. We

shall not be able to move beyond these concrete possibilities until we have attempted to go beyond the particular structures of thought and communication which dominate the mass media in America.

In all of his work, but most recently in *Television*, Raymond Williams has attempted to crack through the limiting and enfeebling nest of assumptions we normally bring to the study of mass communication. Rather than dwelling on the weaknesses of this book, I wish instead to elucidate the path of Williams' argument as it has appeared through his major works and, thereby, to make his arguments more accessible. Williams' theory of communication and culture is not an easy one, however. It turns upon a series of dense and difficult concepts which must be grasped if the theory is to be understood. Three concepts, in particular, are central to his work: community of process, structure of feeling, and intention. It is to these I wish initially to turn.

The notion of the "community of process" serves to set the tone, both descriptively and ethically, for all of Williams' work. The initial assumption is that human experience is meaningful, that man lives in a world which is meaningful, and that his experiences must be made sense of within that world. As a result, the Cartesian separation of consciousness and reality, which is a cornerstone of the scientism of the social sciences, is rejected. Perception, taken in its broadest sense, is a creative process in which the individual makes sense of the information given to him by the world. Interpretation is a vital aspect of all experience, but not in a linear sequence of information processing. We do not first receive some data and then impose an interpretation on it. Rather, the very act of seeing requires the organization of the data according to some meaningful pattern or configuration. These patterns are, according to Williams, provided in the forms of communication. Seeing or experiencing and communication are related in a fundamental way. It is only by seeking ways of describing or communicating our experience that we can be said to have realized the experience. In this way, the forms of socially available communication are determinative of the meaningful structures of the everyday world we inhabit.

There is nothing new or original in this insight. Many writers have pointed out that the human world is distinct precisely because it is meaningful, and that the meaningfulness of experience within the world is constituted in the processes of communication. Communication, the attempt to make a personal and unique experience into a public, shared experience is, then, not only the process of externalizing the private into the public domain, it is also the internalization of the public into the private by which the very possibility of a shared meaningful experience is constituted. This idea is reminiscent of Berger and Luckmann's (1966) description of the creation of a factual world out of subjective meaning.

Such descriptions of the process of communication raise the danger of their own static nature—a way must be found to incorporate creativity and change at the heart of communication. This is the purpose of the concept of the community of process, which points toward the dual pillars of creativity. In the first place, because the world is constantly changing and being changed, new interpretations are constantly required, and, thus, new forms of description, of communication. More important, creativity is implicit within the act of communication as a publicly available practice, for when the individual attempts to communicate his own personal experience through the available forms of communication, he struggles "by work and language to make a new reality. Reality is continually established, by common effort" (Williams, 1965: 315). Communication, as a process whereby the individual, operating within the bounds of the social, is pushed to transcend it, becomes the process of community: "since our way of seeing things is literally our way of living, the process of communication is in fact the process of community: the sharing of common meaning, and thence common activities and purposes; the offering, reception and comparison of new meanings, leading to tensions and achievements of growth and change" (Williams, 1965: 55).

The community of process points toward the simultaneous limits of intersubjectivity and creativity. If one ignores the need for shared meaning, the world dissolves into incomprehension, the Biblical Babel of tongues. If, on the other hand,

creativity is sacrificed in the concern for sharedness, the essential processes of growth are denied. Communication is a struggle between two poles, each of which serves as the limit on the other.

The community of process points toward the creative aspect of all forms of human practice. Creativity is not limited to the endeavors of a particular class of people, nor to a particular set of activities. Man is, almost by definition, the creative animal, and culture is our name for the implicit creative dimension of human existence. The ethical concern behind Williams' work can be seen at this point: we need a common culture, that is, "a common process of participation in the creation of meanings and values" if we are to maintain the creativity of communication necessary to social growth (Williams, 1968b: 34).

But culture is more than a community of process, a process implicit within human experience. The word also describes an aspect of all human life and of the vividly particular life of a particular people. To capture this dimension of culture, culture as lived experience, Williams introduces the concept of structure of feeling. This term plays an important role in Williams' theory, as it operates simultaneously on two levels—descriptive and methodological. At the descriptive level, the structure of feeling captures the experiential dimension of culture. Most generally, we might think of the structure of feeling as a description of the experience of living in a particular world, where we remember that it is through communication that such worlds are created.

One can see the culture of a particular group as an expression of the ways in which all of the activities, beliefs, relationships, and so on of the group share a certain coherence, i.e., they combine to form a consistent totality. This is the key which we must take hold of—human life is made up of a complex variety of activities. Too often, the mistake we make is to relate one of these, for example, literature, or the messages of the mass media, to some other activity which is conceived of as more basic, such as economics or behavior. Williams argues that culture is the way in which all such activities relate to each

other to form a cohesive whole, and so our task is "to discover the nature of the organization which is the complex of these relationships" (Williams, 1965: 63). If our task is to understand human experience, we cannot rest with the idea of taking one activity, considered in isolation, and relating it to another, equally isolated activity. The study of culture leads one to see the way in which life is experienced, not as a series of isolated domains and activities, but as a total experience, the particular living result of all the elements. One is aiming to capture the "felt quality" of a life at a particular time and place. Culture, or the structure of feeling, is the name we give to the implicit or underlying structure exhibited by and in social experience. By following this path, Williams avoids the reduction of cultural studies to the relationship between the individual (product or behavior) and the social (message or institution). The beginning point must always be the totality of lived experience. The notion of culture as a structure of feeling is the expression of the view that all of the acts of man compose a world, a general reality within which any particular act must be located. It is by virtue of their location within this totality that the specific activities exist as what they are and have the particular meanings they do. Culture in this sense is, then, the totality of activities and, simultaneously, is present in every activity. The totality of experience, this structural constitution of worlds, is itself revealed and constituted through language, social relationships, institutions, images, attitudes, responses to historical change, and so on. It is revealed, not only in the structures and categories of our experiences as they actualize themselves, but in the omissions and consequences as well. It is both a deeply personal and a deeply social structure, so that it is, properly speaking, neither personal nor social. It is an inherited (and changing) collective structure which finds its expression in the intensely personal and creative ways we respond to our situation. The paradox of the structure of feeling is that "it is as firm and definite as 'structure' suggests, yet it is based in the deepest and often least tangible elements of our experience. It is a way of responding to a particular world which in practice is not felt as one way among others—a conscious 'way'—but is,

in experience, the only possible way" (Williams, 1968a: 18). Thus, we may see the structure of feeling as a description of the culture or world within which we live not as it is consciously and explicitly seen, but as it is assumed within the entire range of our responses and actions, "a significant community, a way of seeing and being and acting in the world" (Williams, 1971: 18).

At a second level, the structure of feeling serves as a methodological term in Williams' work. It is a means of interpretation or criticism by which one can relate a particular work to a particular culture. It has reference simultaneously to the internal order or form through which a particular text is organized and to a corresponding pattern of experience which exists at a particular moment. Williams does not assert that the two structures are identical, but rather that the relationship between them is defined internally, within the structure of the communication itself. This requires that the interpreter constantly move between some individual texts and other aspects of social life. As a method, the notion commits the researcher to the impossible, to remain in constant touch with and faithful to the particularities of that which he is studying while he attempts to find a connection with more general relationships defining the structure of social life.

The result of this complex argument is that the problem of communication is virtually identified with that of culture, although culture and communication are not themselves identified. The relationship between culture, communication, and community is essential in Williams' work, for it is through the complex relationships existing between these terms that we can see the importance of the structure of social relationships, given as the community or process, to an understanding of culture as the structure of feeling.

The final term we need to consider in Williams' scheme is that of intention. It has arisen only recently, although its seeds were present in his earliest work whenever Williams confronted the actual structures of community and communication within contemporary culture—the character of its material ownership, its limiting social assumptions which exclude people from participation in the cultural process. At the level of the

community of process, the problem of a common culture is one of language or communication: how can all people share in the process of the creation of new meaning? But the actualities of cultural life point to a "community of culture" within which the problem is one of revolutionary politics, for it is the power struggles implicit within class structure, each class embodying different models of social relationships, which effectively prevent the development of a common culture.

In any period, there are always competing structures of feeling, one of which will be dominant or hegemonous. It is the perception of real conflicts within the culture that leads Williams away from such concepts as text and structure and toward the notion of practices. The earlier terms focus attention on objectified and quasi-universal aspects of communication which can be studied outside the context of their original creation. But such an approach closes off the possibility of our understanding the communication as a real human event rather than as a mere artifact. Cultural practices are the expressions of relationships, and behind all relationships lie intentions, requiring an understanding of the relationships in terms of the economic and political question of power between classes. This intention need not be understood as some conscious motive on the part of some actor, in fact, it is to be discovered within the communication itself as that which makes it precisely what it is, as that which gives it its identity. The notion of intention directs our attention to the interests of a particular hegemony. Any communication is created within and is an expression of a particular structure of feeling, of a particular structure of social relations. That structure is always related to the conflict existing between the dominant culture, the hegemony of which controls the means of communication, and alternative cultures embodying alternative models of communication, social practices, and social relations.

This argument is crucial as we turn our attention to the processes and structures of mass communication. All communication embodies models of communication, models of the structure of human relationships. As these models congeal into institutionally sanctioned forms of communication, we lose sight of their origins as forms of social practice which embody the intentions of the

hegemonous culture. Thus, we must return to viewing communication as a practice, and the study of communication must concern itself with all aspects of this practice, a practice of "real men in real places and significant social relationships" (Williams, 1974b: 19). The study of practices must still be seen as essentially a study of forms, but now clearly seeing that questions about the forms of communication "are also questions about institutions and about the organization of social relationships" (Williams, 1974b: 23). The recent shift in Williams' language—from texts to practices, from structure to form, and from totality to hegemony—is significant, for it represents a continuing attempt to avoid abstracting communication out of its real-life situation. Texts, structures, and totality tend to lead us away from a "consciousness of process," a consciousness of the power struggles within a historical framework constituting the actuality of culture within our everyday lives (Williams, 1974a: 121).

With this background, we may turn our attention to Williams' study of television. Of course, one could read and appreciate the book without an understanding of Williams' position as sketched above, but one then runs the risk of failing to see just how radical Williams' task is. There are few authors who have attempted so sweeping a reevaluation of the historical and conceptual framework within which we have understood television and mass communication in general. One can, of course, draw connections with the work of Ben Bagdikian, Asa Briggs, or certain Marxist theoreticians, but Williams has begun to chart a unique course which promises rich rewards, not only conceptually but pragmatically as well.² *Television* is a rare attempt to bridge the gap between theory and praxis, and it would be a shame to miss its rich depth of insight.

The analysis is carried on simultaneously at two levels: that of practice and that of form. The shift from text to practice proves to have been crucial in the present study, pointing simultaneously toward the past and the future. By taking technology, institutions, and cultural texts to be objectifications of what are fundamentally forms of social practice, Williams is able to reveal these structures to be the result of concrete decisions made in the particular

historical circumstances into which the media were inserted and were expressive of particular intentions and interests. Williams' analysis is revolutionary not only in its understanding of the development and nature of mass communication, but in its import for social action as well. By challenging the naively held belief that the structures of mass communication characterizing our society are natural and inevitable, and by disclosing the hidden intentions behind the practices and concrete choices that have been made, Williams opens the possibility of alternative practices of social communication. The label "mass communication" is itself expressive of a particular set of choices, of practices which need to be challenged and rejected in the search for a "common culture."

We can see the pattern common to each of the arguments of the book in terms of a hermeneutic analysis.³ Williams begins by attempting to recover the historical context in which current patterns of mass communication were created. One can then see the concrete decisions which led the media to take the forms they now have, and the power interests behind the particular practices and choices which we now think of as inevitable. Of course, in establishing its hegemony, every group seeks to objectify its practices so that they appear not as real choices made out of real alternatives, but as the only possible choices, determined by factors outside of human control. To demythologize the historical process is the first stage of a radical critique of mass communication.

Williams attempts first, then, to rediscover the historical situation within which choices were made and to reveal the interests behind them. The major impediment to this radical awareness is obviously the belief that it is in some way the technology itself which has determined the shape of the practices of mass communication. So it is not surprising that Williams first of all debunks technological determinism. Technology is too easily made to carry the burden of blame for the criticisms raised against the mass media. There is a strong and a weak version of this belief. In the strong version, technology is seen to develop along inevitable lines guided by its own logic (as telegraphy begets telephony which begets broadcasting, and so on) and to determine the structures and consequences of mass communication. In the

weak version, which Williams calls "symptomatic technology," technology is seen as one element entering into a causal chain in which other social forces determine the uses and, thus, the effects of the technology. On this latter view, the uses to which technology is put are merely a byproduct of other forces which would have led to essentially the same result even if the technology had not been present. Thus, technology is "either a self-acting force which creates new ways of life, or it is a self-acting force which provides material for new ways of life. These positions are so deeply established in modern social thought, that it is very difficult to think beyond them" (Williams, 1974a: 14). The issue is, for Williams, a crucial one. Williams debunks this reification of technology in two steps. First, he argues against seeing technology as an accidental discovery isolated from the totality of social practices, from the "existing social formation." The development of the technology of television was guided by implicit interests, seeking to solve particular needs as they existed within the dominant culture. There was a sense of what the outcome should and would be, and many of the technological discoveries were made in the attempt to solve the known impediments to such a technology. Decisions were made and guided by an awareness of a general process of social transformation defined by a complex series of relationships between forms of communication within the productive or economic sphere and social forms of communication. As Williams (1974a: 119) says, "The decisive and earlier transformation of industrial production, and its new social forms, which had grown out of a long history of capital accumulation and working technical improvements, created new needs but also new possibilities, and the communication systems, down to television, were their intrinsic outcome." Thus, television was discovered because it was sought, and it was sought as a result of a complex historical process relating industrial, political, and social needs. It would be an interesting task to see just how many of our "histories" of the mass media fail to understand this relationship between social needs and interests and the invention of technology, and instead treat the technological development as a mere process of accident or of scientific creation.

But it is necessary to consider the question of the social uses of technology as well. These questions must be kept separate, for it is too easy to fall into a position which, while accepting the above argument, sees technology as determining its potential functions; after all, if it is created with certain interests, to fulfill certain needs, it is not surprising that it must take on particular structures of use within society. While it is certainly true that the technology was developed with particular interests in mind, television (or broadcasting in general) was placed into a wider social system with its own needs. That is, we must understand the technology as an element (and originally a very marginal one at that) within an ongoing process of social change. We can attempt to describe the sociohistorical situation into which broadcasting entered primarily in terms of an increasing awareness of mobility and change, although we would be remiss if we ignored the role which already existing media were playing. The crucial argument Williams presents is that, by focusing on the needs, we have come to see broadcasting as a structure of communication involving transmission to many people. That is probably as good a definition of mass communication as one will find in the literature. But it is at just this juncture that we lose sight of the real choices made: an investment was made in the production of television receivers as a technology to be made available to the individual. This, for Williams, is the crucial fact—that television was seen as a mode of distribution. Transmission and production were important only as means to make distribution possible. Individual sets could not be sold unless there was something to see. And the process of reception was ignored entirely. There were, of course, alternative ways in which the technology could have been used, although it is difficult to appreciate them. This decision was not made haphazardly, of course, it was a perfectly reasonable choice “within the determining limits and pressures of industrial capitalist society” (Williams, 1974a: 27).

This original decision, made in the interest of a capitalist hegemony, defined the structure and problems of the broadcasting institutions, for it is clear that the major impetus for the production of programming would come from the manufacturers of receivers themselves. Thus, a pattern of “centralised transmission

and privatised reception" was established that has become the very meaning of mass communication in our society. The variety of institutional options present in the contemporary world, as few as they might be, shows us that the technology itself is not the determining factor. Rather it is the use of the technology, a choice made by real men with real interests. The various institutional forms have resulted from attempts to mediate between two sets of competing interests: manufacturers versus government, and public service versus commercial interests. Each country finds a solution to the first of these conflicts which reflects the basic power relations within the society, and the institutions of broadcasting become a microcosm of the social system itself. This can be seen by examining the history of the complex relations between the manufacturers of television programming and the government, a history which Williams briefly traces for both England and the United States. The latter seems to have realized the most consistent institutional structure, given the initial decision of use. The economic sector determines the shape of broadcasting; the public is conceptualized as a competitive market of consumers, and the measure of success (quality?) is profit.

The second conflict, between public service and economic interests, is more difficult to understand, first, because it is significant both in terms of institutions and programming, and second, because the idea of public interest has been defined within the already existing practices. There is no clear understanding of "public interest" or of how it is to be judged. It is variously identified with the state, with some segment of the public, with "free and independent" commercial stations (which are of course themselves capitalist institutions committed to profit), or with some notion of consensus, "a consensus which is first assumed and then vigorously practiced, rather than consensus which has been openly arrived at and made subject to regular open review" (Williams, 1974a: 39). We see the same development occurring on the international level today, as the American practice of mass communication, with all of its implicit interests, is exported around the world.

We see now that television, as we know it, is not preordained by technology, but is rather the result of real choices made by real men in real situations, and, furthermore, we see the interests behind these decisions. The final domain of practices which needs to be examined is that of programming: forms, distribution, and flow. It is, however, at this point that Williams' analysis is weakest; his arguments are often unconvincing and his aim is often obscure. Nevertheless, there are a number of interesting insights and suggestions. In a chapter on "the forms of television," Williams attempts to make explicit in concrete examples the way in which many of the forms of television programming (news, discussion, education, drama, variety, sport, advertising) are the result of an interaction between the technological possibilities of the medium and "the received forms of other kinds of cultural and social activity" (Williams, 1974a: 44). Of course, this does not deny that there are forms of programming which are unique to television, nor is it meant to underplay the transformations which may result by adapting a form from another medium to television. Rather, this discussion points once again to the historical origins of the social uses of television and relieves the technology itself of any burden of guilt. There are no necessary reasons why television programs should be built on the model of forms inherited from other media; that is a choice which has been made, presumably a choice expressive of particular interests. Turning to a cursory content analysis of the programming schedules of five television stations, Williams concludes that while there are clear connections between types of broadcasting institutions and uses of the medium (in terms of types of programming), he rejects the simple equation of quality and type (i.e., that a drama is better than a situation comedy). Such distinctions and judgments are part of our own cultural "set," expressive of the practices and interests of the cultural hegemony. We are led to ignore the form, the manner of presentation, in favor of a categorical judgment of content. As a result, it is insufficient to think of programming in terms of distributions among types. We need to find a way of describing the real experience of viewing television which will still enable us to see the choices being made and the interests behind the chosen practices. For this, Williams turns to an analysis of sequence or flow. He takes flow to be the

defining characteristic of broadcast communication, both as a technology and as a social form of communication: "What is being offered is not, in older terms, a program of discrete units with particular insertions, but a planned flow, in which the true series is not the published sequence of programme items but this sequence transformed by the inclusion of another kind of sequence, so that these sequences together compose the real flow, the real 'broadcasting' " (Williams, 1974a: 90). That is, the experience of viewing television does not comprise three discrete series of messages—programs, advertising, and pre-views—but rather involves a complex interweaving and interaction among these three sequences. While the analysis is often difficult to follow and unconvincing, Williams is clearly attempting to develop a method of interpretation which can simultaneously remain faithful to the experience of the viewer and reveal the choices which have been made in the details of the programming. These choices are not dictated by the nature of the technology, nor by the nature of the material which is the subject of the programming. Rather, it embodies a particular use of the medium. Williams constantly returns to the observation that choices are being made, structures and practices established, and properties of the medium selected. Even at the level of minute detail, we can therefore discover an active process of choice, embodying practices of communication, expressive of particular interests, namely those of the hegemony or "dominative culture."

It is at this stage that we must turn to the second level of the hermeneutic analysis. Having debunked the objectified practices (which quickly become myths, limits on human possibility) and revealed them to be real choices and practices, we must attempt to understand more fully the intention behind them. It is simple to argue that the choices are the expression of a particular hegemony, a dominative culture which embodies within the practices of mass communication its own interests. It is more difficult, albeit necessary, to describe this dominative culture. Here, we find it necessary to return to the notion of the structure of feeling, as a descriptive and methodological definition of culture. Although it is primarily in his analysis of flow that Williams draws upon this term, we shall attempt to show that

part of the radical insight of the book lies in Williams' discovery of a common structure of feeling underlying the totality of communicative practices and choices embodied within television as we know it. In his discussion of sequence, Williams (1974a: 116) constantly refers to the fact that the particular flow of items "establishes a sense of the world." He writes (1974a: 105), "The apparently disjointed 'sequence' of items is in effect guided by a remarkably consistent set of cultural relationships," and again, that a "directed but apparently casual and miscellaneous flow operates, culturally, following a given structure of feeling" (1974a: 111). The structure of feeling is operative at the level of the uses of technology, the forms and the sequencing of content, and can be described as "mobile privatisation."

This way of seeing and living in the world seems to have arisen at the turn of the twentieth century, with the changing structure of urban, industrial life. Notice what is being offered—a way of seeing and being in the world as it is defined by the productive and economic sphere. Thus, it is not surprising to find Williams, throughout this and other works, relating this structure of feeling to the interests of the capitalist system. The second industrial revolution brought about major changes in both style of life and attitudes toward social existence. There was increasing mobility and rapid change. People became increasingly aware of the world around them and its influence on their lives. Consequently, they lost the sense and assurance of being in control of their own destiny. This is a change which has been pointed to by many authors, although John Dewey in this country stands out as one of the most eloquent. With an increasing breakdown of community life, and the discovery of the possibility of new places, there as a concomitant withdrawal from public life. Technology allowed each home to become its own community, satisfying the needs of its members. A radical split between the home as the domain of privacy and the domain of public life occurred. This privacy, which was both "an effective achievement and a defensive response" demanded new forms of relationship (Williams, 1974a: 27). The home is self-sufficient only as long as it is constantly supplied by the outside world. There developed, naturally enough, a new structure of relationship, a new practice of communication. It was into that structure that the

broadcast media entered, and within which they took on the peculiar social use and structure of centralized transmission and privatized reception.

We can, following Williams, expand our understanding of the structure of mobile privatization, discovering it within the conventions of the naturalistic drama. It implies a radical disjuncture between the actor or individual, locked into his own private world, and the outside world, seen as both hostile and incomprehensible. And yet the individual is always looking toward that world, waiting for something to happen, waiting for the moment when it will force him to act, momentarily stepping outside of his privacy, only to retreat at the first opportunity. We see this structure in many forms in our own culture: in the twentieth-century hero, pursued by a hostile world which he neither understands nor which understands him, unable or unwilling to communicate. We see it in the rejection of both public life and real privacy (subjective life) in favor of a kind of personalization which denies both the individual and the social. We see it in our own feelings toward nature as a savage world which needs to be conquered before it can destroy us. We see it, finally, in the mediation which is required in all communication today, whether it be through a commentator, a "representative," a commodity, or a camera. There is no longer any direct contact, either with the world (for the camera is always used as a third person, an impartial observer on the scene) or with another human being. In denying both the social and the individual, this structure of feeling cannibalizes relationships. It cannot present the purely subjective, the private, as stream of consciousness tries to do, nor can it present the public or social domain, for this is always incomprehensible, given the conventions of the hegemony, without mediation. The camera, for example, becomes an individual defining and dominating the reality presented. Freedom becomes personal, neither private nor public, but an illusion of freedom within the domain of mediations and objectifications. Is this not the freedom of choosing among colas, or breakfast cereals, or automobiles? Our communication places us in the role of "professional visitors" to life, unable to escape into the world, or into ourselves. Of course, this structure seems so natural, so "true" to us that it is extremely difficult to see it

as one possibility among others, as a choice which has been made and which is continually being reaffirmed in each instance of communication. We are sometimes shocked into recognition when this structure is denied or broken, as when the camera becomes an actor in the event, or becomes conscious of itself as an observer, or when the social world is presented as the necessary reality within which our own subjective experiences are defined. But it is rare to find the dominant structure of feeling challenged within the institutions and forms of communication which it has created. It is the domination of this structure of feeling, of privatized mobility, that Williams discovers operative at every level of the communicative practices of television: the uses of technology, the institutions, the forms and sequence of programming.

Television is revealed to embody a series of choices which has defined the practices available to us and, thus, has created for us a narrow range of social relationships as possibilities. Furthermore, we have seen the particular structure which is carried at every level—mobile privatization—and that behind the choices and practices embodying this particular way of seeing and living in the world are the intentions of the particular capitalist hegemony of our society. This seems to be the most radical critique of mass communication to have been raised within recent times.

The argument is not quite complete, however. Two small but not insignificant points need to be considered. The first is the nature of thought about the uses and effects of communication so predominant within our society, not merely in academic circles. Williams identifies three types of perspectives within the current literature. The predominant way the media are studied involves the search for effects. There are, however, some significant problems with the notion of effects as it is used. In the first place, effects are often isolated abstractions from the reality of social experience. The media are only one element within a complex social situation. More significantly, the particular definitions of effects are themselves the effect of particular ideologies. For example, the search for the effects of violence seems to presuppose that violence is not valued within our society—for there is no problem, in a society which treasures

violence, with portraying that violence. And yet, clearly, this points to a contradiction in our society, for violence is, in many ways, positively valued in modern society. The search for political effects is often defined in terms of voting behavior, yet this is clearly a definition constituted within our own cultural hegemony which severely limits our understanding of political behavior. In fact, "the most important question to ask is about the causes of these definitions of political effects" (Williams, 1974a: 124). There is, then, a hegemony operative within the very terms we use to discuss the mass media. We should not be surprised that it is the same hegemony we have identified above. As Williams (1974a: 126) argues, "effect is ordinarily studied at a tertiary level, as between competing or alternative factors, and in the breach or observance of given social, cultural and political norms. Yet just these factors and norms are themselves effects; they are the established institutions, relationships and values of a given order of society."

Turning his attention next to theories such as McLuhan's, which see technology as the cause and all else as mere effect, Williams (1974a: 128) rejects both the formalism of such approaches and the path they follow, by which they end up "an operative social theory and practice, in the heartland of the most dominative and aggressive communications institutions in the world." Such approaches, which essentially accept technological determinism (be they in the form of McLuhan's prophetic rhetoric, or the causal effects model), deny the radical need for reflection and social action which plays such a major role in Williams' work. On the other hand, those positions which see technology as an effect (i.e., symptomatic technology such as functionalist positions) either ignore the historical processes of determination, or fail to see that determination is never total, again ignoring the real historical processes through which intentions and determination change. Williams (1974a: 121) concludes that we must return to a consideration of real historical processes, to specific practices rather than general structures, and to a consciousness of intentions, "of the real social relations within which modern communications systems operate."

Only in this way can we succeed in demythologizing current theory and practice, but hermeneutical reflection and critique

are by themselves insufficient. In the end, Williams returns to his image of "the long revolution." Change can be accomplished only through ongoing and continuous social action. Only insofar as communities struggle to challenge the cultural hegemony and offer more humane structures of relations can real social progress be accomplished. It is, in the end, appropriate that Williams concludes his argument with a chapter entitled "Alternative Technology, Alternative Uses?" The call for social action is not a rhetorical one, for a new technology is being offered, new institutions are being developed, and new uses are being discovered. Choices are being made, made within the hegemony of the existing system, and, unless action is taken, a great opportunity will be lost, an opportunity to move closer to common culture. If this opportunity is lost, it will be our responsibility.

Within the current literature of the field, *Television* is like no other work. It carries the analysis of mass media to a level of critical reflection which is even rarer today than it was earlier in the century. Its significance is in the structure of the interpretation, in its final bridging of the gap between theory and practice. It has something to say, a challenge at least, to scholar and professional alike.

Yet in the end, however radical, interesting, and penetrating the analysis may be, the book fails. It fails, not because of political ideology, not because of a flaw in its critical hermeneutic approach, but because the rich detail which is the flesh of any interpretation is lacking. Williams seems to be aware of this, for in the "Foreword" he warns the reader that the monthly reviews of television which he wrote for *The Listener*, from 1968 through 1972, are "a necessary background for the present inquiry." Indeed, these reviews are full of the rich detail, the careful critical analysis and exegesis so lacking in the present work. Nevertheless, this short book is a significant achievement and one not to be ignored by anyone interested in mass communication. It will hopefully, at last, bring Raymond Williams to the attention of the American public as the leading Marxist proponent of an interpretive approach to the study of communication.

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NOTES

1. Other works of Williams of interest to communications scholars include Williams (1958, 1965, 1966, 1971, 1973a, 1973b, 1974b, and 1976).
2. Critical commentaries on Williams include Green (1974), Eagleton (1976), Barnett (1976), and Grossberg (1976).
3. Hermeneutic analysis is used here to refer to any interpretative method which attempts to discover or rediscover from a text a level of meaning which has been lost, hidden, or is not yet a part of our conscious understanding. For further discussion of this notion and the correlative notion of demythologization, see Ricoeur (1970, 1974) and Grossberg (1976).

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